



State of Wisconsin  
**Department of Health Services**

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## **Rare Fungal Infection Can Go Undiagnosed**

*Physicians advised to be alert to symptoms of blastomycosis*

State health officials today said that Wisconsin residents should be on the lookout for blastomycosis, an uncommon but potentially serious fungal infection.

“Blastomycosis may be misdiagnosed and treated as pneumonia, so individuals are urged to talk to their physicians if they have continual, persistent pneumonia-like symptoms to help ensure early detection and treatment of the fungus,” said Dr. Jeffrey Davis, State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases.

Blastomycosis develops when inhaled spores of *blastomyces dematitidis* establish a primary infection in the lung. If not detected and treated early, blastomycosis can cause serious health complications. Infected individuals may develop an acute lung infection that begins with a dry cough and fever, and may progress to weight loss, chest pain, and a persistent cough producing thick sputum. Other signs and symptoms may include muscle aches, coughing up blood, night sweats, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Some individuals infected with the fungus never develop symptoms. Health officials stress that blastomycosis is not spread from person to person.

In nature, the fungus resides in the soil or in decaying vegetation and foliage. Only under specific conditions of temperature, humidity and nutrition can the fungus grow and produce infecting spores. The spores become airborne when the soil or ecologic niche is disturbed. The actual area infected with the fungus is likely to be small and may be limited to several square yards or one rotting log. Blastomycosis usually occurs during the wet periods of spring and fall.

In Wisconsin, there was a total of 428 reported cases between January 1, 2005, and December 31, 2007. Most of the cases occurred in northern Wisconsin counties, which is believed to be due to more favorable environmental conditions. Out of the 428 reported blastomycosis cases, 267 individuals were hospitalized.

Dogs may also develop blastomycosis from inhalation of spores following disruption of soil. Canine blastomycosis is a common canine disease and if improperly diagnosed, infected dogs may die. Signs and symptoms in dogs vary and may include eye problems, lack of appetite and energy, raspy bark, and raspy, labored respirations.

For more information about blastomycosis, go to <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/factsheets> or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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